



HEALTH ALERT NETWORK

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

The Nation faces a growing array of public health threats. Chief among these are new and emerging infectious diseases, chronic disease epidemics, environmental health dangers, and bioterrorist attacks.

- Our public health system must be prepared to address these threats. Failure to rapidly detect and respond to a bioterrorism event, for example, could cost thousands of lives.
- Public health professionals in state and local health departments must have access to up-to-date training in essential competencies and skills.
- Most health departments lack the modern, secure electronic systems needed to detect disease outbreaks rapidly, respond to outbreaks, and communicate with CDC, other government agencies, and the public during public health emergencies.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

Through the Health Alert Network (HAN) initiative, CDC is aiding state and local health departments to raise their capacity and preparedness to deal with public health threats. Key elements are modern information and communication systems, a fully trained workforce, and robust organizational capacity to address the full spectrum of public health issues, including potential bioterrorism. Since CDC launched the initiative in 1999, nearly \$90 million in grants have gone to 50 states, Guam, and 7 large cities (including local Centers for Public Health Preparedness). CDC provides consultation and technical assistance to the grantees.

Example of program in action: Within four hours of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, HAN was activated and began transmitting health messages to the top 250 public health officials in the 50 states, Guam and 7 large cities (including local Centers for Public Health Preparedness). Over the course of the ensuing 4 months, some 67 health alerts, advisories, and updates have been transmitted directly from CDC, and now reach an estimated 25,000 direct recipients, including frontline public and private practice physicians, nurses, laboratory workers, state and local health officers, environmental specialists, health communicators, and other professionals. HAN-supported information, communications, and training systems (e-mail, web sites, broadcast message, and electronic distance learning) were in use in all project areas as the public health agencies responded to the crisis.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The HAN mission aims to eventually endow all state and local public health departments with adequately trained professionals and state-of-the-art information and communication systems. This will help them to develop and maintain their capacity to address existing and new health threats.

For information about this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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